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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

INFORMATION SERVICE

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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Scouts of an army of tank-like armadillos, small armored animals whose native habitat is tropical America, have crossed the natural barrier of the Mississippi River and are headed toward the Atlantic coast, according to an announcement today by the Fish and Wildlife Service of the Department of the Interior.

Armadillos are harmless, but because they have extended their range in the United States in recent years, scientists of the Fish and Wildlife Service have been making a study of their habits, the food they eat and their economic status.

This study shows that the armadillo's range has enlarged in this country from a small area in the Lower Rio Grande Valley to include more than half of Texas, a large part of Louisiana, and sections of Alabama, Florida and Oklahoma. According to E. R. Kalmbach, biologist of the Service, the armadillo, when found in moderate numbers is not a menace either to the existence of ground-nesting birds or to agriculture. In fact, he states, because it eats numerous agricultural pests such as the larvae or adults of scarab beetles (highly destructive to crops and pasture), termites, ants and caterpillars, the armadillo is actually entitled to a meritorious citation.

The armadillo is like a small animated tank with its horny covering that forms a carapace over the body. The shell is divided into three sections, one of which covers the shoulders, another the hips, and connected by a series of nine telescoping bands. Females normally give birth to 4 young, all of one sex.

Because it is largely nocturnal, few people ever see an armadillo even in places where it has reached an abundance level of more than 50 to a square mile, the Fish and Wildlife Service points out. It possesses a pronounced odor objectionable to most persons and extremely disconcerting to hunters whose dogs start off on the trail of this pungent scent.

Armadillos are frequently utilized for food in parts of Texas, as well as by Mexicans and Indians in Mexico, earning the appellation of "poor man's hog." Their shells have been fabricated into baskets for souvenirs.

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